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The Dirty Physician: Necessary Dishonor and Fleshly Solidarity in Tertullian's Writings

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Abstract
This article examines Tertullian's multifaceted notion of physician and his views of illness and redemptive healing, particularly his arresting re-appropriation of dirt and dishonor as the basis for restoration against Marcion's alleged conception of a pure and spiritual salvation. Tertullian inverts the dominant value paradigm by rendering the shameful and dishonorable circumstances of the flesh as the necessary signifiers of truth and redemption. His creative reconfiguration of healing through filth and shame redraws early Christian discourse on embodiment and corrects facile typologies about purity and impurity, body and soul, incarnation and salvation, and individual and society.

Keywords
Tertullian, healing, flesh, filth, dishonor

> Ponder now, beginning from the nativity, which is held in hatred. Come now and consider in detail the filth of the generative elements in the womb, [the filth] of fluid and blood, the foul clumps of flesh from the same dirt, the flesh that has to be nourished for nine months long.[1]

Can dirt save? Or must it be consigned forever to the precincts of the polluted and the profane? From the earliest Christian writings, thinkers

*) I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers, Jonathan Rothchild, and, especially, Douglas Burton-Christie for their insightful comments and suggestions.

1) Tertullian, *De Carn. Chr.* 4,1: "Ab ipsa iam exorsus odio habita natiuitate, perora, age, iam spurcitias genitalium in utero elementorum, humoris et sanguinis, foeda coagula carnis ex eodem caeno alendae per nouem menses." Throughout the article, the translations of Tertullian's writings are my own based on the Latin texts in *Corpus Christianorum* (*Tertulliani Opera* [Turnholti: Typographi Brepols], 1954).

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have struggled with the question of how to interpret God's descent into flesh—corruptible, base, dirty flesh—in the incarnation. How, they have asked, could the incorruptible be mixed with the corruptible, the pure with the impure? During the late second and early third centuries, this struggle came to acute expression in the writings of Tertullian (d. ca. 225) who, in response to Marcion's and the Gnostics' claims regarding the nature of salvation, argued for a savior who redeems precisely through his entry into dirty and dishonorable flesh. Tertullian's writings reveal an audacious vision of Christ as the 'dirty physician' who heals through the putatively compromised medium of human embodiment. Dirt and dishonor, in Tertullian's view, become the very means of salvation.

In her classic work *Purity and Danger*, anthropologist Mary Douglas contends that the inscription of something as dirty implies an offense against order. "It [dirt] implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[2] Consequently, she argues, reflection on the meaning of dirt contains the potential for a reordering of reality and the construction of a new pattern: "[It] involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death."[3] Douglas' template is helpful for elucidating Tertullian's use of dirt and dishonor to articulate the meaning of Christian salvation. Tertullian's transgressive configuration of dirt and dishonor as therapeutic implies a reorganization of discourse according to a new paradigm and compass. In antiquity, the mortal, polluting, and disease-ridden flesh typically differentiates human from divine (as divinity was generally mapped in terms of cleanliness, purity, and immortality);[4] for Tertullian the dishonorable flesh becomes the site of healing that unites human and divine and overcomes the otherwise irreversible effects of death. If, as Douglas maintains, purity is "the enemy of change, of ambiguity and compromise,"[5] Tertullian, by privileging the anomalous descriptors of dirt and dishonor, successfully integrates ambiguous and complex elements of human experience such as

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2) Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2006 [1966]), 44; see also 2-7, 50-51.

3) Ibid., 7. See also 49-50, 148, 199.

4) Dale B. Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 43-45.

5) Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 200.

birth, illness, suffering, death, and decay into one pattern that affirms the fullness of existence.

Central to Tertullian's vision is the image of Christ and God as healers of illness and as physicians.[6] Expanding on a synoptic topos (Mt. 16:17; Mk. 2:17; Lk. 5:31), Tertullian constructs a palliative version of Christianity, conceiving of Christian faith as a virtual infirmary for human beings in desperate need of a drastic cure and imagining this cure in a novel and subversive way: God the physician restores through filth and dishonor.[7] Tertullian effectively discredits the conception of salvation as pure and spiritual articulated by enemies such as Marcion, Apelles, Basilides, and Valentinus[8] and creates a reordered soteriological structure that classifies flesh, filth, and dishonor as curative. According to this remedial paradigm, Christ's fetid and vile flesh effectuates healing insofar as it brings a transformative message to the ill and marginalized, reforms social boundaries, and offers a concrete cure to humanity.

In this article, I argue that Tertullian's creative notion of healing—through dirt and shame that accompany physicality—effectively redraws

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6) See, for example, medicus (e.g., Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 1,22,9; 2,16,1; 4,11,1-4; *Scorp*. 5,7-8; 5,10-12; *De Res. Mort*. 9,4) and remediator (e.g., *Adu. Marc*. 4,8,4; 4,35,5). In addition, Tertullian indicates the curing activities of God and Christ by employing such verbs as seco (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 2,16,1; *Scorp*. 5,6), inuro (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 2,16,1; *Scorp*. 5,6), amputo (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 2,16,1), constringo (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 2,16,1), curo (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 4,8,4-5; 4,35,6; 4,35,8; *Scorp*. 5,5; 5,7), remedio (e.g., *Adu. Marc*. 4,11,2; 4,35,6; 4,35,8; 4,35,11; 5,14,2; *De Res. Mort*. 20,7), medicina ago (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 4,12,9), restituo (e.g., *De Carn. Chr*., 4,4), emaculo (e.g., *De Carn. Chr*. 4,4), redintegro (e.g., *De Carn. Chr*. 4,4), resuscito (e.g., *De Carn. Chr*. 4,4), medeor (e.g., *De Carn. Chr*. 7,9), auxilior (e.g., *Scorp*. 5,8), subvenio (e.g., *Scorp*. 5,8), medico (e.g., *Scorp*. 5,10; *De Res. Mort*. 47,14), sano (e.g., *De Res. Mort*. 9,4; 47,14), and such nouns as praesidium (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 1,22,9), remedium (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 1,22,9; 4,9,8; *Scorp*. 5,12-13; 6,11), curatio (e.g., *Adu. Marc*. 4,8,4-5; 4,9,7-8; 4,9,12; 4,35,4-5), medicina (e.g., *Adu. Marc.* 4,12,15; 4,25,12; 4,35,8; *Scorp*. 5,5-6; 5,12), medella (e.g., *Scorp*. 5,8). On medical imagery in Tertullian's writings, see T.P. O'Malley, *Tertullian and the Bible: Language-Imagery-Exegesis* (Nijmengen: Dekker & Van de Vegt N.V., 1967), 98-107. On the link between religion and medical theory see also Martin, *Inventing Superstition*, especially 36-50.

7) See, for example, Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 1,11,8; 2,27,7; 3,7,6; 3,11,7; 4,21,11-12; *De Carn. Chr*. 4,1-3; 4,6; 5,1; 5,3; 8,2; 9,6; 9,8.

8) Tertullian assumes an interrelationship between the heresies of Marcion, Apelles, and Valentinus; this interconnection is particularly explicit in *De Carne Christi*. However, the Marcionite 'heresy' constitutes the foundational 'perversion' of all the heresies that deny the flesh of Christ. Consequently, in this article I will focus on Tertullian's polemical discourse against Marcion even though he frequently conflates other thinkers in his polemical attacks.

early Christian discourse on embodiment and challenges facile typologies distinguishing purity and impurity, body and soul, incarnation and salvation, and individual and society. Tertullian's construal of Christian soteriology employs classical cultural assumptions in order to destabilize the values expressed through these very same assumptions. To illuminate the meaning and significance of Tertullian's innovative soteriological achievement, I will focus on three primary issues. First, I analyze the distinct usages of the concept of physician and the different dimensions of healing and illness in Tertullian's thought to clarify precisely how he arrives at his original understanding of salvation mediated through filth and dishonor. Second, I evaluate Tertullian's critique of Marcion's savior God as a devious and incompetent physician who offers spurious spiritual therapies. Finally, I examine Tertullian's subversive soteriological strategy, which asserts that dirt and dishonor are not only necessary but indeed salutary.

I. Prescribing the Right Medicine: Tertullian Responds to his Nemeses on Flesh and Healing

Historically, Christian thinkers have effectively utilized a discourse of disease and filth to demarcate doctrinal deviancy: heretics are portrayed as doctrinally, morally, physically, and mentally ill and heresy is viewed as illness as well as the cause of illness.[9] Correspondingly, the symbolic power of purity efficiently underpinned claims to truth and authority, created hard lines that delineated alterity, and clarified the process of self-definition. While Tertullian does appropriate—to a certain extent—the existent, culturally dominant paradigms of purity/impurity and honor/dishonor in his diagnosis of Marcion's and the other 'heretics' ' moral character and

[9] Cf. Heinrich von Staden, "*Hairesis* and Heresy: The Case of the *haireseis iatrikai*," *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Self-Definition in the Greco-Roman World*, vol. 3. Eds. Ben F. Meyer and E.P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 76-100. It is worth noting that Tertullian's preoccupation with anti-heretical rhetoric reflects a larger and varied concern expressed elsewhere in early Christian discourse. For example, see Rebecca Lyman, "The Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism," *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*. Eds. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 45-62; "The Making of a Heretic: The Life of Origen in Epiphanius *Panarion* 64," *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997): 445-451; and Christine C. Shepardson, "'Exchanging Reed for Reed': Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jews in Ephrem's *Hymns of Faith*," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 5:1 (2002): 1-22.

teaching, I contend that he also subverts these established patterns to lay bare the novel therapy offered by Christianity. A consideration of Tertullian's usage of the categories of illness and healing can help to illuminate the bold and ingenious character of his approach. Employing a hierarchical binary of health and illness, Tertullian identifies his theological nemeses as heretics by ascribing to them such terms as ulcer, poison, fever, nausea, belly- and head-aches. He maintains that the teaching of the heretics has the deteriorating effect of physical sickness. In *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting*, he argues: "The poison goes inward and hastens into the internal organs. Immediately, all the former senses become paralyzed," he warns, "the blood of the soul freezes, the flesh of the spirit decays, the nausea at the [Christian] name is intensified. And now the mind seeks for itself [a place] where it may vomit."[10] In *Prescription Against the Heretics*, Tertullian admonishes that the heretics' mythologies, elaborate cosmologies, and unfruitful inquiries, spawned by presumptuous worldly wisdom, spread like a corrosive cancer.[11] He further states that, similar to a fever which kills human beings, heresy destroys infirm faith and brings with it "eternal death and the heat of a greater fire."[12] In spite of this, Tertullian laments, rather than guard against heresies, as humans do against the abominable evils of a fever, they have a ruinous tendency to wonder at heresies, thus increasing their power.[13] Still, if Christians learn to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves, heresy, like fever, will be unable to ambush and harm them. Tertullian also asserts that the heretic should be offered only two corrections, since endless debates over Scripture with the blaspheming perverts will not provide anything for the orthodox Christian, except for a stomach-ache, a head-ache, and a lost voice.[14]

Tertullian's negative characterization of heresy as illness serves two main purposes: it enables him to articulate the full extent of the threat presented by the heretics; and it provides him with an opportunity to elucidate the cures offered by God and Christ. In *Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting*

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10) Tert. *Scorp*. 1,10: "[I]ntimatur uirus et properat in uiscera; statim omnes pristini sensus retorpescunt, sanguis animi gelascit, caro spiritus exolescit, nausea nominis inacrescit. Iam et ipsa mens sibi, quo uomat, quaerit."

11) Tert. *De Praesc. Haer.* 7,7.

12) Ibid., 2,1-8. Tertullian writes (2,4): "Haereses uero mortem aeternam et maioris ignis ardorem inferentes malunt quidam mirari quod hoc possint, quam deuitare ne possint, cum habeant deuitandi potestatem.

13) Ibid., 2,3-4.

14) Ibid., 16,2; 17,5.

(ca. 203/204 or 211/212)—a text that in itself serves as an antidote for the bite of the Gnostics and Valentinians—Tertullian identifies three different, but interrelated aspects of healing: healing through the teaching of faith, healing through the incarnation, and healing through martyrdom.[15] According to Tertullian, God, like a good doctor, places Adam on a reasonable and well-balanced nutritional-plan, which includes all food groups except for one unsuitable shrub.[16] Reckoning his nutritional plan too restrictive, Adam eats what was prohibited, sins, and suffers "terminal indigestion."[17] While humanity suffers from the "inflammation of the offense," God carefully concocts a medicine, that is, the teachings of faith that remedy the injury and offer relief, "rescinding the word of death through the word of life."[18] Further, while humanity falls into sickness due to its own volition, God falls into the sickness of the human condition in the incarnation in order to heal it.[19] For, "[t]he human being always first brings business to the physician, but in the end he has brought the danger of death upon himself."[20] Christ's material embodiment, death, and resurrection heal the wound caused by Adam's fall, nurture and rehabilitate humanity, and make possible eternal life. Thus, the teaching of God and the embodiment of Christ cure a queasy human race.

Martyrdom constitutes a third form of healing. Since an exceptionally serious illness demands an equally exceptional cure, the human being can receive a certain salvation and a second rebirth through martyrdom.[21] Lacerations, blood, and broken bodies traditionally attested to the indisputable dominance of the empire; however, Tertullian disrupts that paradigm and contends that the martyr—through the degradations of the martyr's death—victoriously, physically, and immediately inherits the reign of God.[22]

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15) Timothy Barnes suggests that Tertullian may have been writing under the influence of Galen, who provides recipes for remedies against scorpions' stings. Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 215.

16) Tert. *Scorp.* 5,11.

17) Ibid., 5,12: "Edit inlicitum et transgressione saturatus in mortem cruditauit."

18) Ibid.: "Sed dominus sustentat a feruura delicti, donec tempore medicina temperaretur, paulatim remedia composuit, omnes fidei disciplinas et ipsas aemulas uitio, uerbum mortis uerbo uitae rescindentes, auditum transgressionis auditu deuotionis limantes."

19) Ibid., 5,10: "Incidit et ille in aegritudines tuas."

20) Ibid., 5,10: "Homo semper prior negotium medico facit, denique sibimet ipse periculum mortis attraxit."

21) Tert. *De Res. Mort.* 8,5-6; *Scorp.* 6,9; 6,11; *De Fug. in Pers.* 12,10.

22) Tert. *Scorp.* 6,9; 6,11; 12,9; *De Res. Mort.* 43,4. See also Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge,

Similar to the shameful circumstances of Jesus' birth, life, and death, the very public dishonor of the martyr's death paradoxically renders it righteous and glorious.[23] Tertullian's call to the sacrificial death of martyrdom is concrete because he assumes a concrete understanding of the remedial benefits of martyrdom.[24] The re-presentation of Christ's sacrificial martyrdom by the martyr, who reincarnates and performs Christ's kenotic life and death for the Christian community, gives meaning to alienation and social marginalization, suffering, and death, and forges a material bond between Christ and the martyr that generates a salvation of the whole human being, body and soul.[25] Martyrdom also washes away all impurities

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1995), 115-125. Regarding the early Christian challenge to Roman power-discourse and the inversions of values (which Tertullian effectively adopted and intensified), Perkins writes: "The discourse of the martyr *Acts*, representing pain as empowering and death as victory, helped to construct a new understanding of human existence, a new 'mental set' toward the world that would have far-reaching consequences. This discourse created a new paradigm for understanding suffering and death and, consequently, the experiential world they supposedly authenticated. Things that had universally been thought bad and contemptible, such as pain and death, were suddenly seen as valuable." Ibid., 122. See also, Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 48. Castelli notes: "the ordinary values of honor and shame, glory and dishonor are disrupted, inverted, and overturned by the logic of martyrdom." Ibid., 118.

23) Tert. *De Fug. in Pers.* 9,4.

24) In her work *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens: Die Theologie des Martyriums bei Tertullian* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), Wiebke Bähnk discusses Tertullian's concrete martyrdom theology and his affirmative answer to the question "Sanguinem hominis deus concupiscit?" (Does God demand the blood of the human being? [*Scorp.* 6,11]), predicated on his understanding of the necessity and duty of suffering for the Christian. See, for example, Ibid., 76-88, 121-154, 193-232. Bähnk elucidates the connection between Tertullian's material notion of martyrdom and his notion of salvation through flesh: "Antignostisch ausgerichtet ist auch die in 'Scorpiace' ebenfalls deutlich werdende Betonung der *Leiblichkeit und Realität* des Leidens der Märtyrerinnen und Märtyrer.… Doketische Vorstellungen hingegen, die das Kommen Christi in das 'Fleisch' negierten, bedeuteten die Leugnung des realen Leidens Christi und damit auch der Erlösung des Menschen. Die in 'Scorpiace' von ihm bekämpfte Haltung gnostischer Gruppen zum Martyrium ist somit quasi die 'Kehrseite' einer Theologie, in der auf Grund der Prämisse der 'Nichterlösbarkeit des Fleisches' der Verflüchtigung der Realität der *Passion Christi* die Negierung der Verpflichtung zum tatsächlichen *Leiden der Gläubigen* entspricht." Ibid., 135-137.

25) E.g., Tert. *Scorp.* 12,2; 13,9-11; 15,1-2. Cf. also Erin Ronsse, "Rhetoric of Martyrs: Listening to Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14:3 (2006): 305-306. On the transgression and transformation of established societal and political relationships, orders, nexuses, and conventions in the martyrdom accounts see Perkins, *The*

and infections; it is the most effective antidote against the poisons of heresy and heals the inflamed tumors of the idolatry inherent in sin, dissent, and heresy.[26]

So why do not more human beings undertake martyrdom, the ultimate public witness to the truth of Christianity? Tertullian attributes it to general human perversity—the reckless and self-destructive human tendency to refuse a beneficial remedy and opt for the pernicious danger that will bring death.[27] He also acknowledges that the instruments of torture and the agonizing death are repelling, yet, likening the experience to a visit in the doctor's office, he reminds his audience that while the scalpel, the cauterizing iron, and the fire of the mustard are painful they restore health.[28] As the physician's infliction of pain on a body cures and repairs, so the pain of martyrdom restores and makes whole by severing.[29] Tertullian thus prescribes a homeopathic treatment, according to which 'like heals like' and the remedy mirrors the affliction in order to restore equilibrium:[30]

> Nevertheless, to be cut and burned and stretched and bitten is not on that account an evil, because it brings beneficial pains. . . . The benefit excuses the horror of this work. Further, the one howling and groaning and bellowing will soon fill up the same hands of the physician with the fee and will proclaim [them] the most skilled and will now deny that they are cruel. Thus, also martyrdoms rage violently, but for salvation. It will also be allowed for God to heal for eternal life through fires and swords and anything painful. But you will indeed marvel at the physician even in that regard, because he employs cures that are almost of equal characteristics compared to the characteristics of the complaints. . . . For he even restrains heat by applying more heat, quenches the burning by tormenting the thirst more, collects the excess of bile by various draughts, and he restrains the flow of blood by draining the small veins on the surface.[31]

Suffering Self, 26-27, 104, 115-117, 211-212; Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 34; and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1-64.

26) Tert. *Scorp*. 5,6-13; 6,9. In 12,10, Tertullian contends: "Sordes quidem baptismate abluuntur, maculae uero martyrio candidantur."

27) Ibid., 5,5: "Est et haec peruersitas hominum salutaria excutere, exitiosa suscipere, periculosa conquirere, medicamina deuitare, aut mori denique citius quam curari desiderare."

28) Ibid., 5,6.

29) Cf. ibid., 5,9.

30) Cf. Luis Garcia Ballester, "Soul and Body: Disease of the Soul and Disease of the Body in Galen's Medical Thought," *Le Opere Psicologiche di Galeno*. Eds. Paola Manuli and Mario Vegetti (Napolis: Bibliopolis, 1988), 117-152, especially 147.

31) Tert. *Scorp*. 5,6-8: "non tamen secari et inuri et extendi morderique idcirco malum, quia dolores utiles affert. . . . Horrorem operis fructus excusat. Vlulans denique ille et gemens et

Yet, Tertullian complains, human beings are always less eager to suffer for a constructive remedy than for a destructive offense. "Why now does the human being feel reluctant to suffer from a cure, what he was not then reluctant to suffer from a vice?" he asks. "Is it displeasing to be killed for salvation to the one who was not displeased to be killed for destruction? Will he be nauseous from the antidote, who drank the venom?"[32] Tertullian identifies the Gnostics and the Valentinians—these scorpions with a deadly sting crawling forth in the heat of persecution—as opponents of martyrdom, that is, opponents of a true cure.[33] They capitalize on weakness and fear, and they try to convince regular Christians of the needless nature of martyrdom, poisoning them with their anti-Christian venom.[34] Tertullian stresses that while martyrdom is violent and deadly, an effective antidote must be as unpleasant as the corroding poison.[35]

This analysis of Tertullian's understanding of illness and healing reveals an intriguing pattern. Everyone is ill by virtue of the fall. The heretics, however, are especially diseased and contagious because of the debilitating and pernicious effects of their false teachings. There is a cure, effected by God, through God's willingness to take upon God's self the diseased human condition in the incarnation. The cure, nevertheless, is costly: Tertullian recognizes that true healing requires a treatment that, however necessary, is, from the human point of view, both painful and harsh. Hence, Tertullian holds a deep respect for the witness of the martyrs, who open themselves to God's purgative homeopathic treatment generously and fully. To appreciate the significance of this therapeutic process, especially in light of the sickness spread by Tertullian's perceived opponents (in particular Marcion), it is necessary to examine more closely Tertullian's critique of the spiritual malpractice of Marcion's inept physician.

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mugiens inter manus medici postmodum easdem mercede cumulabit et artifices optimas praedicabit et saeuas iam negabit. Sic et martyria desaeuiunt, sed in salutem. Licebit et deo in uitam aeternam per ignes et gladios et acerba quaeque curare. Sed medicum quidem miraberis etiam in illo, quod ferme pares adhibet qualitates medellarum aduersus qualitates querellarum. . . . Nam et calores caloribus amplius onerando compescit et ardores siti potius macerando restinguit et fellis excessus amaris quibusque potiunculis colligit et sanguinis fluxus defusa insuper uenula reuocat."

32) Ibid., 5,13: "Quid grauatur nunc pati homo ex remedio quod non est tunc grauatus pati ex uitio? Displicet occidi in salutem cui non displicuit occidi in perditionem? Nausiabit ad antidotum qui hiauit ad uenenum?"

33) Ibid., 1,5; 1,12.

34) Ibid.

35) Ibid., 5,6.

II. The Spiritual Malpractice of Marcion's Inept Physician

Although Tertullian unleashes many polemical arguments against the enemies of the Church, he confronts Marcion (ca. 85-160), whom he refers to as a "murderer of truth" (*interfector ueritatis*), with particularly intense fervor.[36] His chief concern is with Marcion's doctrinal deviancy; at the heart of this deviancy is his inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the salvific power of the flesh, which in Marcion's view is unclean and dishonorable and, hence, unworthy of God. Tertullian contests this understanding of purity, arguing for a more capacious, inclusive understanding of God's salvific work. He also raises questions about the truthfulness and integrity of his opponent, questions that are for Tertullian integrally related to the truthfulness of Marcion's entire world view.

From the outset of book one of *Against Marcion* (ca. 198/208 CE), Tertullian contrasts his own integrity and *ethos* with Marcion's questionable character, and Tertullian's descriptions forcefully appeal to the *pathos* of the reader.[37] As part of his strategy to undermine Marcion's viewpoint, Tertullian sets out to persuade his audience of Marcion's general deviance and deceit. To execute this task and outline Marcion's inevitable degeneration, Tertullian begins by defaming Marcion's tainted beginnings through an *ekphrasis*. In the *exordium*, Tertullian charts a vivid biography of the offender and sets the stage for Marcion's doctrinal perversion by first illustrating his moral perversion.[38] The reader learns that Marcion comes from Pontus in Asia Minor, which, as if ashamed of its own barbarism, is situated far from civilization.[39] In Pontus, life is uncouth: their "sexual appetite is promiscuous and quite exposed even when they hide."[40] Their women "are not softened by their sex in accordance with modesty. They exclude their breasts [from their normal duty], they do their house work with battle-axes, they prefer to serve as soldiers rather than to marry."[41] In the end-

36) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 5,2.

37) Cf. Robert Dick Sider, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Art of Tertullian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 13-14, 29-30.

38) Cf. Ilona Opelt, *Die Polemik in der Christlichen lateinischen Literatur von Tertullian bis Augustin* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1980), 211; Volker Lukas, *Rhetorik und literarischer 'Kampf:' Tertullians Streitschrift gegen Marcion als Paradigma der Selbstvergewisserung der Orthodoxie gegenüber der Häresie* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), 40-42.

39) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 1,1,3.

40) Ibid.: "libido promiscua et plurimum nuda; etiam cum abscondunt."

41) Ibid.: "Nec feminae sexu mitigantur secundum pudorem; ubera excludunt, pensum securibus faciunt, malunt militare quam nubere."

less winter and darkness of Pontus, savagery and cannibalism are the only things to keep the population warm.[42] This barbarian and God-forsaken place shapes Marcion's depraved and infectious thought, which Tertullian likens to the pestilence-laden breeze at the rising of the Dog-star.[43]

These attacks on Marcion's character create a context for grasping the full extent of Marcion's doctrinal deviancy. In his reconstruction of Marcion's theology, Tertullian contends that Marcion commits several egregious offenses, including the separation of the lower vengeful creator God of the Law from the higher merciful savior God of the Gospel.[44] This division has important ramifications since it shapes the prescribed soteriological treatment as well as its therapeutic target and impact. While Marcion, for the sake of coherence, surgically disconnects the gracious God of loving mercy from the vengeful God of cruel justice, Tertullian safeguards the paradoxical tension between these dimensions of God that, according to Tertullian, conveys the core of the divine mystery.[45] Tertullian, therefore,

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42) Ibid.

43) Ibid., 1,19,2. On the etymology and interpretation of *aura canicularis* see E.P. Meijering, *Tertullian Contra Marcion: Gotteslehre in der Polemik* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 7-8.

44) Cf., for example, ibid., 1,2,1-3; 1,7,1; 1,13,1-2; 1,16,1; 1,19,1; 1,19,4-5; 1,21,5; 1,26,1-2; 2,11,3; 2,12,1-2,13,5; 2,29,1-4; 3,1,1-2; 4,1,1; 4,6,1-4; 4,17,10-11; 4,25,2-3; 5,13,15; *De Res. Mort.* 2,2-3; 2,8; 14,6-7. Gerhard May differentiates between Marcion's configuration of the two gods and the Gnostics' model in terms of a difference of degree: Marcion *radically* distinguishes the two gods, as reflected in his dichotomy between the Old Testament and his own New Testament canon. May, "Markion in seiner Zeit," *Gerhard May: Markion. Gesammelte Aufsätze*. Eds. Katharina Greschat & Martin Meiser (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2005), 5; "Markions Genesisauslegung und die 'Antithesen,' " Ibid., 43-50, espec. 44, 48-49. For further discussion of Marcion's teaching on the two gods, see May, "Marcion in Contemporary Views: Results and Open Questions," *Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Schism in Early Christianity*. Ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 259-281; "Markion in seiner Zeit," *Gerhard May: Markion*, 1-12, espec. 3-5; Gerd Lüdemann, *Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity*. Transl. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996), especially 148-167; Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1921), especially 135-181; Winrich Löhr, "Did Marcion distinguish between a just god and a good god?," *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung: Vorträge der Internationalen Fachkonferenz zu Marcion, gehalten vom 15.-18. August 2001 in Mainz*. Eds. Gerhard May & Katharina Greschat (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 131-146; Barbara Aland, "Sünde und Erlösung bei Marcion und die Konsequenz für die sog. beiden Götter Marcions," Ibid., 147-157.

45) May argues that Marcion's missionary success was based on Marcion's removal of a series of theological difficulties and internal contradictions, and his forging of a radical internal consistency and clarity (whereas Tertullian wrestles with the paradoxes and tensions intrinsic

admonishes his audience not to bifurcate love and justice and not to confuse the pain of evil and sin with the pain of justice because the devil is the author of the former and God the author of the latter.[46] Consequently, humans have no right to complain when God, the physician and surgeon, provides his patients with a medicine and cure that is bitter and painful, since this treatment will effectively clean out and remove the infections of sin. Tertullian writes:

> [I]f indeed you should say that a physician must exist, yet you find fault with his instruments because they cut and cauterize and amputate and constrict—but when could there not be a physician without the tools of his trade? But blame him for cutting badly, amputating improperly, cauterizing without need. And thus also criticize his instruments as evil assistants. Indeed, it is the same when you admit that God is a judge, but in fact reject those emotions and feelings by which he judges.[47]

Tertullian characterizes Marcion's savior God as one "who is neither offended nor angry nor punishes, who has no fire burning in Gehenna, for whom no gnashing of the teeth terrifies in the outer darkness: he is only good. Further, he forbids you to sin, but only in writing.... You fool, you call him lord, whom you say is not to be feared, although this is a name of power and also of fear. But how will you love, unless you fear not to love."[48] Marcion's presumption about the goodness of his savior God is specious, according to Tertullian, because such a God, if good, would not allow a morally depraved creator God to wreak havoc in the universe without

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to his competing version of Christianity). May, "Marcion in Contemporary Views: Results and Open Questions," *Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Schism in Early Christianity*, 279; "Markion in seiner Zeit," *Gerhard May: Markion*, 12; "Markions Genesisauslegung und die 'Antithesen,'" Ibid., 44. Cf. also Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 90.

46) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 2,14,2-2,16,2.

47) Ibid., 2,16,1-2: "si medicum quidem dicas esse debere, ferramenta uero eius accuses quod secent et inurant et amputent et constrictent. Quando sine instrumento artis medicus esse non possit? Sed accusa male secantem, importune amputantem, temere inurentem, atque ita ferramenta quoque eius ut mala ministeria reprehende. Proinde est enim, cum deum quidem iudicem admittis, eos uero motus et sensus, per quos iudicat, destruis."

48) Ibid., 1,27,2-3: "deus melior inuentus est, qui nec offenditur nec irascitur nec ulciscitur, cui nullus ignis coquitur in gehenna, cui nullus dentium frendor horret in exterioribus tenebris: bonus tantum est. Denique prohibet delinquere, sed litteris solis.... Stulte, quem dominum appellas negas timendum, cum hoc nomen potestatis sit, etiam timendae? At quomodo diliges, nisi timeas non diligere?"

intervening. A savior God who does not intervene and impose sanctions when displeased tacitly permits.[49] Tertullian thus contrasts the true cure of his God, who is both creator and savior, with the questionable medical practices of Marcion's anemic savior God—a doctor who commits spiritual malpractice. "How will you judge such a physician," Tertullian asks, "who should sustain the disease by delaying the treatment, and should prolong the danger by postponing remedy, so that he may procure a higher fee and greater renown?"[50] In contrast to the competent and dependable medical care offered by Tertullian's God, who as both creator-judge[51] and redeemer heals suffering flesh through suffering flesh, Marcion's God emerges as dishonest and impotent because Marcion's God is either unwilling or unable to stop the ravaging and homicidal creator-judge and, hence, provides no relief for a world in pain.[52]

According to Tertullian, Marcion necessarily denies the physical body of Christ since that would closely connect Christ to the devious creator God and since flesh is withdrawn from the possibility of salvation.[53] Marcion's flesh-less Christ renders him an apparition and, hence, a liar and a charlatan.[54] This deceptive phantasm would be unable to offer anything real and true in terms of healing, and it would be nothing more than a "producer of a spectacle."[55] Marcion believes that it is impossible or unsuitable for God to become enfleshed, and hence his Christ is a salutary spirit. This salutary spirit effects a healing that is merely spiritual since, for Marcion, it is unbecoming for God to concern God's self with the flesh. Tertullian's

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49) Ibid., 1,22,8; 1,26,2-4. Cf. also, for example, 2,12,2-3; 2,13,5; 2,14,3-4; 3,4,4.

50) Ibid., 1,22,9: "Quid de tali medico iudicabis, qui nutriat morbum mora praesidii et periculum extendat dilatione remedii, quo pretiosius aut famosius curet?"

51) On God as creator and judge, see, for example, Tert. *De Res. Mort.* 14,1-8.

52) Cf. Volker Lukas, *Rhetorik und literarischer 'Kampf,'* 178-180, 183-186, 264-265, 374-378, 405, 418-419, 423, 428-434, 455-461, 535-537.

53) For example, Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 1,2,3; 1,11,8; 1,22,1; 1,24,3-5; 3,8,1-7; 4,8,2-3; 4,9,5-6; 4,10,15; 4,20,13-14; 4,40,3; 4,42,7; 5,7,5; 5,14,1; 5,20,3-4. See also Enrico Norelli, "Marcion: ein christlicher Philosoph oder ein Christ gegen die Philosophie?," *Marcion und seine kirchengeschichtliche Wirkung*, 120-126. Norelli writes: "das Böse scheint nach ihr [der marcionistischen Lehre] an die Materie als solche gebunden zu sein.… Die menschliche Seele ist… nach Marcion fähig, das Evangelium anzunehmen, die Sarx dagegen nicht.… Marcion nimmt… eine Verwandtschaft zwischen der menschlichen φύσις und dem Schöpfer an…, aber gerade deswegen denkt er, daß die Menschen nicht anders als über ihre eigene Natur hinausgehend die Seligkeit erreichen können." Ibid., 122-123, 125.

54) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 5,8-9.

55) Ibid., 5,10.

rejoinder holds that this God cannot accommodate the full reality of human existence, which includes both flesh and soul.[56] Tertullian maintains that there is only one God who creates and saves; rather than being a stranger to this God, Christ preaches and manifests this God.[57] Tertullian juxtaposes Marcion's vilification of the body with a strong emphasis on the goodness and dignity of the flesh as well as on the bodily reality and humanity of Christ.[58] Indeed, the flesh—the glorious, dirty clay that sculpts the human being—bears the imprint of the image and likeness of God and is the queen of God's creation, the sister of Christ, and the "consort and coheir" of the soul.[59] Consequently, Tertullian concludes that only a Christ, who as flesh and blood is part of humanity and connected to the creator, can heal humankind because "just as no one employs a physician for the healthy, neither does he do so for those so far removed from Marcion's God as humankind is, [humankind] having its own author and protector, and having from that [author and protector] Christ as its physician instead. This parable [Lk. 5:27-39] means this: the physician is usually provided by that one to whom the sick belong."[60] In his reconception of redemption, Tertullian therefore forges an unbreakable nexus between human identity, incarnation, and healing.

Tertullian's juxtaposition of the inefficacious healing of Marcion's fleshless Christ with the capable healing of Christ the physician is rooted in his

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56) Ibid. Also, 8,7. See further *Adu. Marc.* 1,19,2; 3,9,1-7; 3,10,1-5; 3,11,1-9.

57) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 2,29,1-2; 3,1,1.

58) Cf. Tert. *De Res. Mort.* 5,1-3; 6,1-5; *De Carn. Chr.* 2,1-2.

59) Tert. *De Res. Mort.* 6,1-9,5. See especially 9,2 and 7,13. In 7,13: "Ita caro, dum ministra et famula animae deputatur, consors et coheres inuenitur, si temporalium, cur non et aeternorum." Cf. Tertullian's construal of the primacy of flesh, "clay," in terms of the creation of the human being in 5,8-9: "Hominem autem memento carnem proprie dici, quae prior uocabulum hominis occupauit: *Et finxit deus hominem, limum de terra,*—iam homo, qui adhuc limus—*et insufflauit in faciem eius flatum uitae, et factus est homo*, id est limus, *in animam uiuam, et posuit deus hominem, quem finxit in paradiso*. Adeo homo figmentum primo, dehinc totus. Hoc eo conmendarim, uti quidquid omnino homini a deo prospectum atque promissum est non soli animae uerum et carni scias debitum, [ut] sic non ex consortio generis, certe uel ex priuilegio nominis."

60) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 4,11,3: "Nam sicut sanis medicum nemo adhibet, ita nec in tantum extraneis, quantum est homo a deo Marcionis, suum habens et auctorem et protectorem, et ab illo potius medicum Christum. Hoc similitudo praeiudicat, ab eo magis praestari medicum, ad quem pertinent qui languent." Cf. also *De Res. Mort.* 9,3-4: "diligit carnem tot modis sibi proximam, etsi infirmam, sed *Virtus in infirmitate perficitur*; etsi imbecillam, sed *Medicum non desiderant nisi male habentes*; etsi inhonestam, sed *Inhonestioribus maiorem circumdamus honorem*."

understanding of the salvific qualities of the flesh. Influenced by Stoic thought, Tertullian is a materialist insofar as he argues that all things possess some form of corporeality or body and insofar as he makes the flesh the curative location of salvation.[61] Even the soul is an invisible body sculpted to fit perfectly in the mold of the outer flesh and bones body, which helps explain the profound bond between body and soul.[62] Tertullian also differentiates between *caro* and *corpus*: the flesh constitutes the material content or substance, while the body references the totality of the exterior form or reality.[63] Thus, for Tertullian it is important to make two key distinctions. On the one hand, he distinguishes the visible corporeality of the physical body and the invisible corporeality of the soul; on the other hand, he distinguishes between the flesh and the body. Tertullian recognizes the mutual interconnection and complementarity of these four realities.

The correspondence and concrete correlation between the human being's body, flesh, and soul, and Christ's body, flesh, and soul have dramatic therapeutic implications. It allows Tertullian to re-imagine the function of the flesh: in his thought, flesh becomes the locus not of human misfortune but of human hope as well as a token of divine action.[64] In accordance with what one might describe as Tertullian's material realism, flesh is salvific in its very crudeness. Considering "how great a prerogative this trifling and filthy substance has in God's eye," Tertullian even makes the audacious claim that "[t]o such an extent is the flesh the pivot of salvation. Concerning this, it is dispatched by God with the soul. It [the flesh] is this very

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61) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 11,20: "Omne quod est corpus est sui generis." On Tertullian's 'materialism' and his influences from Stoicism see, for example, A. A. Long, "Soul and Body in Stoicism," *Phronesis* 27 (1982): 34-57, especially 36. See also Brown, *The Body and Society*, 77; Richard A. Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology: A Study in Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965), 92-93.

62) Tert. *De Anim*. 5,2-6; 9,1-8; *De Res. Mort*. 17,2; 33,9-10; 53,8. Regarding the relationship between flesh and soul in Stoicism, see Long, "Soul and Body in Stoicism," 36, 39, 42, 49, 53. On the commingling of flesh and soul, see, for example, Tert. *De Res. Mort*. 7,9; 16,10. On the corporeality of the soul, see further Jérôme Alexandre, *Une Chair pour la Gloire: L'anthropologie réaliste et mystique de Tertullien* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2001), 241-256.

63) See Alexandre, *Une Chair pour la Gloire*, 199-207, for a helpful discussion of the difference between *caro* and *corpus*.

64) Tert. *De Res. Mort*. 6,5: "Ita limus ille iam tunc imaginem induens Christi futuri in carne non tantum dei opus erat sed et pignus."

thing that brings about that the soul can be elected by God."[65] In virtue of possessing flesh linked to the creator God and to other bodies, Christ, the healer of illness (*remediator valetudinum*), mends, restores, and reconciles a fractured and contaminated world of bodies and souls.[66] To sharpen the point, Tertullian constructs a powerful argument whereby he reconfigures filth and dishonor as remedial and asserts that what saves is the necessary dishonor at the heart of Christian faith.

III. Necessary Dishonor: The Salvific Paradox

In both *Against Marcion* and *On the Flesh of Christ*, Tertullian underscores that Christ came down into this world and put on the indignity and dishonor of the flesh.[67] He was necessarily clothed in filthy garments, that is, flesh, in order to free a frayed humanity from illness and loosen the bonds of death:[68] "Further, the dishonor of my God that belongs to you is an oath of humankind's salvation. God changed places with humankind, so that humankind might be taught how to act like God. God acted equal with humankind, so that humankind might act equal with God. God was found to be small, so that humankind might become the greatest."[69] By contrast, for Marcion and the Marcionites God's total dishonor cannot constitute the basis for humanity's salvation.

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65) Ibid., 8,1-2: "Videamus nunc de propria etiam Christiani nominis forma, quanta huic substantiae friuolae ac sordidae apud deum praerogatiua sit. … adeo caro salutis est cardo. De qua cum anima a deo allegatur, ipsa est, quae efficit, ut anima allegi possit a deo."

66) See, for example, Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 4,8,4.

67) E.g., Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 1,11,8; 2,27,7; 3,7,6; 3,11,7; 4,21,11-12; *De Carn. Chr.* 4,1-3; 4,6; 5,1; 5,3; 8,2; 9,6; 9,8. In some places (for example, *De Carn. Chr.* 4,1-4; 4,6; *Adu. Marc.* 3,11,7; 4,21,11-12), Tertullian presents the audience with a multivalent notion of dishonor: on the one hand, he sarcastically exaggerates the dishonor of the physical world and human embodiment to caricature and dismantle the cosmology of the heretics; on the other hand, he argues that Christ *really* embraces and elevates the dirt and dishonor of the human condition through the incarnation. This deliberately thickened and elastic notion of dishonor becomes a valuable rhetorical tool that highlights the interconnectedness of his cosmology, Christology, anthropology, and soteriology.

68) For example, Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 3,7,6; 3,8,4-7; 3,9,5.

69) Ibid, 2,27,7: "Totum denique dei mei penes uos dedecus sacramentum est humanae salutis. Conuersabatur deus [humane], ut homo diuine agere doceretur. Ex aequo agebat deus cum homine, ut homo ex aequo agere cum deo posset. Deus pusillus inuentus est, ut homo maximus fieret."

To counter the Marcionites and different Gnostic groups, Tertullian expatiates on Jesus' embarrassingly base and ordinary beginnings. He describes in graphic, yet, tender detail how Jesus takes on the abject squalor of the flesh: like any other fetus, Jesus floats in the "sewer" of the womb for nine months and is born under much pain covered in slime, blood, and waste.[70] He cries when he first sees daylight and suffers his first wound when his umbilical cord is cut; he is washed and swaddled.[71] As an infant, he wallows in his uncleanness in his mother's lap and fusses at her breast, forcing her to engage in the normal and unglamorous care of an infant.[72] For Tertullian, the grittiness and indignity of Mary's motherhood and Christ's birth and flesh bear testimony to a holistic salvation, and he elaborates on the gory and painful, but breathtakingly wonderful conditions for Christ's fleshly solidarity with humanity. Chapters four and five in *On the Flesh of Christ* (ca. 206) are vivid examples of Tertullian's re-appropriation of uncleanness and dishonor as the basis for healing. They also illustrate Tertullian's subversion of Marcion's appropriation of purity, commonly associated with truth and orthodoxy. But Tertullian makes it clear that the pure, undefiled nature of Marcion's God is in fact polluting and putrid and, hence, powerless to heal.[73] Tertullian exhorts Marcion:

> Ponder now, beginning from the nativity, which is held in hatred. Come now and consider in detail the filth of the generative elements in the womb, [the filth] of fluid and blood, the foul clumps of flesh from the same dirt, the flesh that has to be nourished for nine months long. Describe the womb swelling from day to day, heavy, anxious, not even calm when sleeping, uncertain in its feelings of dislike and desire. Inveigh now also against the very shame of a laboring woman, which is to be honored both for the danger and as sacred in its nature. Certainly, you also shudder at the infant, which is brought forth with all its impediments; certainly, you scorn it also after it has been washed and is dressed in swaddling clothes and shaped by massages, and smiled at with affectionate cooing.… Without doubt, Christ loved that human being as he was curdled in the uncleanness in the womb, as he was brought forth through the shameful parts, as he was nourished amidst his playthings. Because of him he came down, because of him he preached, because of him he cast himself down in all humility unto death, even death of the cross.[74]

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70) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 3,11,7; 4,21,11. See also *De Carn. Chr.* 5,1; 20,5-6.

71) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 3,11,7; 4,21,11.

72) Ibid.

73) Ibid., 4,21,10.

74) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 4,1-3: "Ab ipsa iam exorsus odio habita natiuitate, perora, age, iam spurcitias genitalium in utero elementorum, humoris et sanguinis, foeda coagula carnis ex

In Tertullian's reading, the filth of the flesh as well as its squalid conditions constitute the crux of Christ's embodiment; it shows that Christ's flesh is just like the normal flesh of human beings, accompanied by all the gross physical realities. Willemien Otten suggests that for Tertullian "the meaning of the Incarnation is not that the divine Word comes to suspend the ordinary workings of the human body by being born in an extraordinary fashion.... By joining the ranks of ordinary humans in experiencing a physical human birth, Christ the divine Word creates the possibility that humanity may join him in experiencing an extraordinary bodily resurrection. To vouchsafe the salvific novelty of this human birth of the divine Word, Tertullian describes its most striking feature as he explains how Mary became a wife *in partu*."[75]

Mary's body—interlocked as it is with Christ's and, hence, with the rest of humanity's—becomes during pregnancy and birth a forceful and bold testimony to the therapeutic foulness of Christ's fleshly solidarity with humanity.[76] Maintaining the force of the paradox,[77] Tertullian construes

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eodem caeno alendae per nouem menses. Describe uterum de die insolescentem, grauem, anxium, nec somno tutum, incertum libidinibus fastidii et gulae. Inuehere iam et in ipsum mulieris enitentis pudorem, uel pro periculo honorandum, uel pro natura religiosum. Horres utique et infantem cum suis impedimentis profusum; utique et ablutum dedignaris quod pannis dirigitur, quod unctionibus formatur, quod blanditiis deridetur.... Certe Christus dilexit hominem illum in inmunditiis in utero coagulatum, illum per pudenda prolatum, illum per ludibria nutritum. Propter eum descendit, propter eum praedicauit, propter eum omni se humilitate deiecit usque ad mortem, et mortem crucis."

75) Willemien Otten, "Christ's Birth of a Virgin Who Became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 (1997): 256-257.

76) On the soteriological link between Tertullian's Mariology and his anti-docetic position see Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Mary's Virginity *In Partu* and Tertullian's Anti-Docetism in *De Carne Christi* Reconsidered," *Journal of Theological Studies* 58 (2007): 467-484.

77) In "Christ's Birth of a Virgin Who Became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*," Otten rightfully argues that the physical concreteness of Christ's flesh is so vital to Tertullian's theology that it also underpins his discursive usage of paradox, for form and content are interlinked and fund each other in his thought. Flesh and language are, hence, profoundly connected. Ibid., 247, 250-251, 253. Yet, Otten, in my judgment, incorrectly holds that Tertullian's employment of paradox is obfuscating. Moreover, she erroneously maintains that via Mary's transformation from virgin to wife "Tertullian's discourse is stripped of its former dependence on paradoxes to describe its salvific novelty, gaining a new-found accuracy instead." Ibid., 247; cf. also 255-257. Otten adds that "since Christ's birth is itself a *signum contradicibile*, a sign capable of being spoken against, Tertullian no longer needs the language of paradox to describe it. As the sign of Christ's birth is fraught with contradiction, it defies the paradoxes of human language, endowing it instead with a new persuasiveness." Ibid., 256. However, I believe that Mary's change from virgin

Mary as virgin *and* wife rather than a perpetually pure and intact virgin. She is a virgin, since she did not conceive through sexual intercourse (unlike any other mother). However, because of the law of the open body, she is a wife in terms of birthing, for she bore Christ and became his mother from her own flesh and own womb (like any other mother).[78] Through a violent penetration from within that mirrors sexual intercourse, Christ ruptures Mary's body and her womb at birth and de-virginizes her: "For she became a wife through that same law of the opened body, in which it made no difference whether the force was of a male let in or let out: the [male] sex unsealed the same thing."[79] Mary goes from wholly closed to wholly open and, reflecting "the nuptial experience of the fully open womb," Christ is born "not of a virgin but of a woman."[80] As Christ's

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to wife does not break apart the tension of the paradox or compel Tertullian to cease from using paradox as a conduit for expressing the mystery of the incarnation. Moreover, paradox does not eviscerate the concreteness of the human flesh. Instead, a string of paradoxes is retained in the loci of Mary's and Christ's bodies: one inescapable paradox is that Mary, who is human, carries Christ, who is human and divine, in her fleshly body, which is opened by the latter who overcomes rupture and death by being ruptured and dying. Moreover, the central paradox always remains for Tertullian and permeates the very fabric of his theology: certain healing comes to humankind in fragile, dirty, and dishonorable flesh. It is, further, critical not to interpret Tertullian's employment of paradox as a resignation to anti-intellectualism; rather, for Tertullian, it constitutes a means to explain a super-intellectual truth.

78) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 23,2-3: "Peperit enim, quae ex sua carne, et non peperit, quae non ex uiri semine, et uirgo quantum a uiro, non uirgo, quantum a partu. Non tamen, ut [apud illos,] ideo non peperit quae peperit, quia non ex sua carne, nec ideo uirgo quae non uirgo, quia non ex uisceribus suis mater… ….Peperit quae peperit et [uirgo quae uirgo, et] si uirgo concepit [et] in partu suo nupsit."

79) Ibid., 23,4: "Nam nupsit ipsa patefacti corporis lege, in quo nihil interfuit de vi masculi admissi an emissi: idem illud sexus resignavit." I here follow Ernest Evans' version of the text (*Tertullian's Treatise on the Incarnation* [London: SPCK, 1956]), since it expresses in a clearer way a parallel structure in the text and, hence, the meaning (as I read it) of the text. The *Corpus Christianorum* version is: "Nam nupsit ipsa patefacti corporis lege, in quo nihil interfuit de ui masculi admissi; nam emissi idem illud sexus resignauit." Since Mariology and Christology necessarily interlock, Tertullian's Mariology consequently mirrors his material realism, rendering it far more physical and graphic than other emerging Mariologies where "Mary is said to have given birth without opening her womb, conceived without rupturing the hymen, nursed the child without change to her breasts." Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 168.

80) Ibid., 23,5: "Ita quae magis patefacta est, quia magis erat clausa, [si] utique, magis non uirgo dicenda est quam uirgo, saltu quodam mater antequam nupta. Et quid ultra de hoc retractandum est, cum hac ratione apostolus non ex uirgine, sed ex muliere editum filium dei pronuntiauit? Agnouit adapertae uulvae nuptialem passionem."

body breaks open in suffering and crucifixion, Mary's body breaks open in childbirth, and these very ruptures are restorative. Tertullian's depiction of these ruptured bodies paradoxically demystifies precisely in order to protect the mystery that Mary, virgin and wife, conceives and bears Jesus Christ, human and divine. Tertullian's Mariology also bespeaks the subversiveness of Christian healing and unsettles the law of necessity and necessary proofs: Mary fractures the link of causality as she conceives as a virgin and lactates even though milk is not wont to flow "without the genital experience of the womb" ("sine uuluae genitali passione").[81]

Tertullian's ruminations on the wonderful foulness of Christ's birth and infancy directly refute Marcion's ethereal phantasm, "who was set out from heaven, at once full-grown, at once complete, immediately Christ, spirit and power and god alone."[82] Marcion's Christ, as sketched by Tertullian, "never did anything which might bring a blush to the cheeks of his followers—he was never contracted into a woman's womb, never made a mess on his mother's lap or nibbled at her nipples, never wasted time on infancy, boyhood or adolescence. He was suddenly brought from heaven, all at once full grown, complete, and instant Christ, spirit and God."[83] Contrary to Marcion's pure and clean deity, Tertullian's Christ was born, lived, and died in filth and shame, and, therefore, destabilized long-standing hierarchical cultural notions of honor and shame.[84] Since only the filth and

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81) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 20,6. Cf., for example, Cicero, *De Inventione*. Transl. H.M. Hubbell. The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000 [1949]), 1,29,44. See further Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae*. Transl. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5,9,3-5.

82) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 4,21,11: "de caelo expositus, semel grandis, semel totus, statim Christus, spiritus et uirtus et deus tantum."

83) Osborn, *Tertullian*, 112. See also Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 4,21,11: "Non uulua, licet uirginis tamen feminae, coagulatus, et si non ex semine, tamen lege substantiae corporalis ex sanguine et humore, non caro habitus ante formam, non pecus dictus post figuram, non decem mensium cruciatu deliberatus, non subita dolorum concussione cum tanti temporis caeno per corporis cloacam effusus ad terram, nec statim lucem lacrimis auspicatus ex primo retinaculi sui uulnere, nec multum ablutus, nec sale ac melle medicatus, nec pannis iam sepulturae inuolucrum initiatus, nec exinde per inmunditias inter sinus uolutatus, molestus uberibus, diu infans, uix puer, tarde homo, sed de caelo expositus, semel grandis, semel totus, statim Christus, spiritus et uirtus et deus tantum; ceterum, [ut] non uerus, qui non uidebatur, ita nec de crucis maledicto erubescendus, cuius carebat ueritate carens corpore."

84) Regarding the Christian offense against "the hierarchy of the universe," Dale B. Martin writes: "Jesus seemed too 'low class' in his life and death to merit divine accolades. The Christian doctrines of the incarnation and the resurrection of the body carelessly and offen-

shamefulness of bodily realities can heal and reform humanity, Marcion's sanitary and spotless apparition is, for Tertullian, nothing short of false advertising. It can only cure the soul and not the whole human being and, therefore, vitiates the integrity of human existence. Tertullian likens Marcion's Christ to inviting someone to a dinner-party without providing a proper address or promising someone a heavenly kingdom without having a heaven.[85] "O great deception of a promise!"[86] Thus, "he [Christ] wished that we might be healed by his bruise, so that through his dishonor our salvation should stand firm."[87]

Tertullian's emphasis on the grit and filth of embodiment as central to the salvific process demonstrates a sophisticated theological shift. By embracing the offensiveness of the flesh for Christianity and not designating it as otherness, Tertullian sheds light on the profundity of the incarnation. He affirms God's embodiment against Marcion's claim that God is too pure and exalted to subjugate God's self to the body. According to Tertullian, Marcion tries to eradicate the very things—dishonor, filth, and flesh (with their accompanying tensions and difficulties)—that are necessary for faith and restoration. Tertullian contends that it is necessary that Christ experience dishonor in the form of an unclean birth and a violent, humiliating death that testify to the realities of the flesh; a fortiori, he refers to it as the "necessary dishonor of the faith" (*necessarium dedecus fidei*).[88] "Whatever is unworthy of God," he writes, "is beneficial to me."[89]

By revalorizing flesh, filth, and dishonor, Tertullian maps a new vision of salvation that—building on the Pauline construct of the foolishness of faith—confounds and shames the wise and strong (1 Cor. 1:27) through the joyous folly of the incarnation.[90] Appropriating, but expanding upon

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sively combined things of high status—divinity, the soul, the mind—with things of low status—a woman's womb, the flesh, the corruption of matter." Martin, *Inventing Superstition*, 171.

85) Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 3,24,13.

86) Ibid.: "O praestigia magna etiam promissionis!"

87) Ibid., 4,21,12.: "…ita uoluit, ut liuore eius sanaremur, ut dedecore eius salus nostra constaret."

88) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 5,3.

89) Ibid.: "Quodcunque deo indignum est, mihi expedit."

90) It is namely only by becoming a fool to the world by believing the divine foolishness that the human being becomes truly wise. See, for example, Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 4,5-7; 5,1; 5,4; *Adu. Marc.* 5,5,5; 5,5,9; 5,6,1; 5,19,8; *De Praesc. Haer.* 7,1. Regarding Tertullian's refraction of his idea of salvation through the lens of 1 Cor. 1:27, Willemien Otten writes: "Contrary to Marcion, he [Tertullian] sees the shamefulness of Christ's birth not as

Paul's concept of *stulta mundi*, Tertullian's concept of necessary dishonor constitutes his own articulation of the Pauline inversion of values[91] and highlights his conviction regarding the curative qualities of the flesh. His reconfiguration of flesh, dirt, and shame and his use of paradox enable him to produce a powerful counternarrative of Christian salvation, which breaks apart the established laws of necessity and causality (i.e., the laws that govern this world) and forges new laws of necessity and causality. Such strategies convey to his audience that reality is indeed different than it appears to be. Further, it opens up new ways of thinking and talking about the incarnation and the paschal mystery: "I find no other cause for confusion, which might prove that through the contempt of shame I am rightly shameless and luckily foolish. The Son of God was crucified; there is no shame, because it is shameful. And the Son of God died; it is credible, because it is foolish. And he was buried and resurrected; it is certain, because it is impossible."[92] However, Tertullian's usage of paradox should not be viewed as a fideist, anti-intellectual position, but rather as an embrace of the coincidence of opposites and of the profound inversion of values inherent in the Pauline *stultitia*—e.g., the dishonorable is honorable, the incredible is probable, the impossible is certain—that communicate the kenosis of the incarnation.[93]

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un-Godlike but, instead, as a sign of his love for humans and his will to redeem them.... Using the Pauline contrast between divine *stultitia* and worldly *sapientia* found in 1 Cor. 1:27, Tertullian argues that by opting to become human himself the son of God selected a foolish, i.e., conspicuously undivine, way to carry out his redemption of humanity. Becoming human entailed the need to be born with a carnal body." Otten, "Christ's Birth of a Virgin Who Became a Wife: Flesh and Speech in Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*," 251-252.

91) E.g., Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 4,6-7; 5,1; 5,4; *Adu. Marc.* 5,19,8.

92) Tert. *De Carn. Chr.* 5,4: "Alias non inuenio materias confusionis, quae me per contemptum ruboris probent bene impudentem et feliciter stultum. Crucifixus est dei filius; non pudet, quia pudendum est. Et mortuus est dei filius; credibile est, quia ineptum est. Et sepultus resurrexit; certum est, quia impossibile."

93) See, for example, Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation* (New York: Scribners, 1966), 10-11. Timothy Barnes rejects the idea that Tertullian's paradox constitutes an expression of a/anti-rationalism and anti-intellectualism, and he contends that it needs to be seen as an attempt to distinguish the assumptions of Christianity from those of non-Christian society. See *Tertullian*, 223-224. Vianney Décarie also disputes that Tertullian's paradox implies an anti-rationalist position and maintains that his paradox is not distinguishable from Paul's paradox in 1 Cor. 1:27. Décarie, "Le Paradoxe de Tertullien," *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961): 23-31. Dunn points out that the fideist reading of Tertullian probably grew out of a misreading of the "credibile est, quia ineptum est" in *On the Flesh of Christ* 5,4. Dunn, *Tertullian* (London: Routledge, 2004), 31.

In his reframing of soteriology, Tertullian embraces the prevailing, worldly conception of the incarnation and crucifixion as shameful and dishonorable, yet he inverts this notion by rendering these shameful and dishonorable events as the necessary signifiers of truth and redemption. It is in this tension of appropriation and subversion that his discourse works and produces a new compelling paradigm. Through this dramatic theological shift, Tertullian effectively reconceives the meaning of flesh and salvation.

IV. Conclusion

Tertullian's appropriation of dirt and dishonor signals—to apply Mary Douglas' lens—the transgression of culturally dominant value paradigms for understanding embodied life, salvation, and the relations between human and divine. It implies the reconception of human identity and the transformation of salvific processes: dirt no longer corrupts, but restores to health. The paradox that underlies Tertullian's appreciation for flesh, filth, and dishonor conveys both fear of destruction and hope of newness. It integrates and gives value to ambiguous elements of human existence; it obviates the meaninglessness of death, renegotiates the limits set by this life, and promises that in the resurrection of the flesh God will heal and rebuild decomposed and fragmented flesh, skin, sinews, and bones and confer eternity on material life.[94] As Caroline Walker Bynum notes, "[w]hat must rise is the site of our rottenness."[95]

Tertullian's teaching on the resurrection thus pivots on the solid material link that he forges between anthropology and incarnation. In his attacks on Marcion, Apelles, Basilides, and Valentinus, Tertullian underlines continuity between Christ's kenotic assumption of humanity's fleshly reality and humanity's eternal healing: Christ, the physician, has to take on concrete, physical flesh and suffer, die, and resurrect in order for there to

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94) Cf. J.G. Davies, "Factors Leading to the Emergence of Belief in the Resurrection of the Flesh," *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1972): 448-455. See also Robert Dick Sider, "Structure and Design in the 'de Resurrectione Mortuorum' of Tertullian," *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969): 177-196; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, Zone Books, 1992), 239; Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 120-121; Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 49.

95) Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 43.

be a material identity between human bodies on earth and in the afterlife.[96] However, while uncleanness and dishonor are intrinsic to the human condition, Tertullian asserts that they are not truly constitutive of human identity. As restoration washes them away, they will not be included in the resurrection, even though they are necessary for salvation.[97] His discourse, perched in the tension between survival and cessation, maintains that grittiness cures and guarantees reassemblance and identity, yet the reassembled flesh ultimately breaks away from grittiness in the resurrection.

Although Tertullian and Marcion draw dramatically different conclusions, their initial point of departure is, ironically, similar. Both are profoundly interested in the interrelated and acute questions of the nature of God and theodicy: how can a good God create the often miserable human conditions marked by filth, abasement, suffering, and death? By inscribing healing onto the debased flesh of Christ and the debased flesh of the suffering human being and connecting them, Tertullian redefines and elevates dishonor, filth, and suffering to an extent that is radical even within an early Christian context that centers on the foolish and weak things of the world. His discourse also suggests the possibility of redrawing existing societal and communal structures as he exalts and sanctifies the life (and death and life after death) and fellowship of abject, broken, and marginalized embodied human beings, declaring them agents and victors. By creatively reimagining the role of flesh in effecting salvation, Tertullian configures a physician who heals through dishonor and dirt.

96) Cf., for example, Tert. *De Resur. Mort.* 51,1-10.
97) Cf. Tert. *Scorp.* 12,10.